Saint Paul Planning Commission City Hall Conference Center 15 Kellogg Boulevard West

Minutes January 2, 2009

A meeting of the Planning Commission of the City of Saint Paul was held Friday, January 2, 2008, at 8:30 a.m. in the Conference Center of City Hall.

Commissioners Mmes. Donnelly-Cohen, Faricy, Lu, Morton; Porter, Smitten, Wencl; and **Present:** Messrs. Bellus, Goodlow, Gordon, Johnson, Kramer, Nelson, and Ward.

Commissioners

Absent:

Messrs. *Alton,*Barrera, *Commers, *Margulies, and *Spaulding.

*Excused

Also Present: Larry Soderholm, Planning Administrator; Allen Lovejoy, Luis Pereira, Christina

Morrison, and Sonia Butler, Department of Planning and Economic Development

staff.

I. Approval of minutes December 19, 2008.

MOTION: Commissioner Faricy moved approval of the minutes of December 19, 2008. Commissioner Ward seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.

II. Chair's Announcements

Commissioner Donnelly-Cohen, who is the Commission's first vice chair, chaired the meeting. She had no announcements.

III. Planning Administrator's Announcements

Larry Soderholm reported what planning items appeared on the City Council's agenda for the next week.

IV. Zoning Committee

NO ITEMS FOR ACTION

Commissioner Morton announced the items for the next meeting on Thursday, January 8, 2009.

V. Comprehensive Planning Committee

Chair Donnelly-Cohen announced that the committee has completed work on two of the citywide chapters of the new Comprehensive Plan and is bringing them forward for the Commission's

approval today. The committee is continuing work according to the schedule set at the beginning of December. The next meeting is on Tuesday, January 6, 2009 starting at 3:30 p.m., and there is a full agenda.

<u>Water Chapter</u> – Adopt resolution recommending approval to the Mayor and City Council. (*Larry Soderholm*, 651/266-6575)

Larry Soderholm gave a PowerPoint summary of the Water Chapter. He said this is the first time a Water Chapter has been done as part of the Comprehensive Plan and written for policy-makers and interested citizens. He listed the major trends affecting water systems in Saint Paul. Then he explained that the plan has three main parts—the first is about the municipal water supply, the second is about stormwater management, and the third is about sanitary sewers.

Saint Paul Regional Water Services has already done a long, detailed engineering plan that has been approved by the Metropolitan Council and the DNR. The Water Plan describes the same material for a general audience. Our water supply system serves the city and nine suburbs and it is self-financing. The big issues are upstream watershed protection, ensuring that the water treatment plant produces very high quality water, and being prepared for emergencies.

The surface water management section of the plan is the longest part and it contains the most recommendations for change. It has recommendations on preparing for tougher state and federal standards; using best management practices for run-off from streets, parking lots, and rooftops; protecting wetlands and shorelands; and promoting water-wise landscaping.

With regard to the sanitary sewers, Mr. Soderholm said there are recommendations to reduce the number of on-site sewage treatment systems in the city, to cut the amount of inflow and infiltration (I & I) of clean water into the sanitary sewers, and to ensure sufficient funding to maintain and operates the aging sewer infrastructure.

As chair of the Water Comp Plan Task Force, Commissioner Johnson thanked Commissioner Yung-Kang Lu for her active participation and chairing the meetings he couldn't make. He thanked Mr. Soderholm and the other City staff for their work on the plan, and particularly, Andrew Jacobson, who did much of the drafting on the plan before he went off to graduate school in environmental management at Duke University. He is pleased that Mr. Jacobson will be doing a presentation on this plan at a national conference in May.

Commissioner Johnson went on to say that he is active in environmental planning, particularly for water issues, and he tracks activities throughout the United States. While doing the Saint Paul Water Plan, he searched for similar plans and was unable to find anything comparable to our plan. Saint Paul and Minneapolis--being the first large cities on the largest river system in the United States--have a special responsibility for environmental stewardship. The river is a critical resource, which we do take seriously. Unfortunately, the public is generally unaware of how well both our public water and sewage treatment systems are run.

<u>MOTION</u>: Commissioner Morton moved on behalf of the Comprehensive Planning Committee to recommend that the Water Plan be adopted by the Mayor and City Council as a chapter of the Comprehensive Plan. The motion carried unanimously on a voice vote. <u>Housing Chapter</u> – Adopt resolution recommending approval to the Mayor and City Council. (*Luis Pereira*, 651/266-6591)

Luis Pereira, PED staff, gave a PowerPoint summary of the Housing Chapter. He listed the key trends that underlie the recommendations of the plan. The Metropolitan Council asked municipalities to plan for more growth. They projected Saint Paul's growth by 2030 to be 40,000 new residents in 21,000 new households. The city needs to add more housing density at appropriate locations. Other key trends relate to energy costs, affordability, the aging of the existing housing stock (which in many neighborhoods is now approaching 100 years old), and the mortgage foreclosure crisis.

Mr. Pereira continued by describing the major strategies in the Housing Chapter. The first strategy is about housing growth and positioning the city favorably in the metro housing market. The second strategy focuses on established neighborhoods and what they need, including public services and stepped-up housing rehabilitation activities. The third strategy is to ensure the availability of affordable housing across the city, particularly in neighborhoods where there are fewer choices for low-income households. The final strategy also has a policy to ensure the City is taking affirmative steps to further fair housing.

Commissioner Bellus, who chaired the Housing Comp Plan Task Force, said one of the Zoning Committee members suggested a small change in Policy 3.4(a) on page 23, and he agreed with the suggestion. As written, the policy over-emphasizes rezoning applications in relation to siting homeless housing. Therefore, he would simply remove the first three words of the sentence ("Support rezoning to..."), and leave the rest of the wording. The remaining words in the policy give the proper emphasis on location distribution, which is consistent with the task force's intent.

Next Commissioner Bellus thanked Luis Pereira for his steady and thoughtful work over the past two years, and also Yang Zhang, who resigned from PED after the public hearing draft was written. He commented that the task force itself had a wealth of housing knowledge and expertise. This is a very good plan. He asked commissioners to keep two main points in mind as we move ahead. First, there is a lot of deferred maintenance out there. So we need a lot of investment in our existing housing stock. Second, the Housing Chapter emphasizes density, but we need the increased housing density to be concentrated in selected areas. While supporting density, we must also be careful not to do things in existing neighborhoods that detract from their quality of life. The plan does *not* recommend putting more housing units all over the place.

<u>MOTION</u>: Commissioner Bellus moved on behalf of the Comprehensive Planning Committee to recommend that the Housing Plan, with the amendment he proposed on page 23, be adopted by the Mayor and City Council as a chapter of the Comprehensive Plan. The motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.

<u>Central Corridor Update</u> – Staff presentation. (Allen Lovejoy, 651/266-6226)

Allen Lovejoy gave an update on the progress of LRT engineering studies and other work in the Central Corridor. The project is moving into the final stages of preliminary design, and that the City has reviewed the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) which is due to the Federal Transit Administration in mid-January. The City is also working towards a memorandum of understanding with the Metropolitan Council and is also hoping to sign-off on the proposed Operations and Maintenance Facility (OMF) on the Diamond Products site in Lowertown. Mr.

Lovejoy stated that the items that have been decided to date include the alignment, the placement of curbs, and the number and locations of stations. He also mentioned that if money does become available in the project budget, the Metropolitan Council will defer to the City Council to choose one of the Hamline, Victoria, or Western stations for construction. Regarding remaining elements, he specifically mentioned the streetscape planning, and the detailed list of issues under the City's Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Project Office. Mr. Lovejoy noted that the City's approval of the OMF will be tied to the Met Council's approval of the MOU.

Major outstanding issues for Saint Paul are related to parking, property and skyway access, vibration and noise, utility impacts, intersection design, potential for additional stations, and the location and design of substation and signal equipment. Mr. Lovejoy discussed that the City is also looking as bus transfer connections at the stations, and that there is an ongoing dialogue with community groups who are advocating a reduction from four to two traffic lanes on University Avenue. Ongoing work also will be done on an broader public art initiative, more detailed station design, and full streetscape planning. Additionally, he stated, the City would like the project to have more aggressive local hiring requirements, and would like to see a more flexible and comprehensive construction mitigation plan. Mr. Lovejoy stated that some issues, like bus service, use of downtown areaways, and maintenance agreements, likely will not be fully resolved through the MOU, but would need to be worked out in detail in the next 18 months. On streetscape designs, it is expected that plans will become available in two weeks.

Mr. Lovejoy also discussed the complexity of the OMF location process, and the details of the expected Athletic Club block right-of-way acquisition by the City. He also stated that the PED is working to retain a consultant to explore public-private development opportunities with funding available from the Federal Transit Administration. Regarding Minnesota Public Radio (MPR) and noise/vibration issues on Cedar Street, Lovejoy discussed their recent campaign to move the LRT alignment and stressed that these issues can be solved with mitigation, and that the Met Council will be posting a website with facts about the issues and a link to the complete technical study on noise and vibration. In conclusion, Mr. Lovejoy reviewed the project budget and schedule. There was some discussion, led by Commissioners Gordon and Smitten, about the merits and appropriate form of a City response to the MPR campaign.

Commissioner Gordon also repeated the importance of making the recent work on parking available to the public as soon as possible. Mr. Lovejoy agreed and stated that the Mayor's Office is working on a response to the MPR issue, while the Met Council has already been active in responding to emails and public statements.

Commissioner Johnson offered some additional information on the technical aspects of noise and vibration, and expressed his confidence that these problems can be mitigated effectively.

VI. Neighborhood Planning Committee

Commissioner Wencl had no report.

VII. Communications Committee

Commissioner Smitten announced that they will be meeting next week to discuss the annual report for 2008.

VIII.	Task Force Reports	
	No report	
IX.	Old Business	
	None	
Χ.	New Business	
	None	
XI.	Adjournment	
	Meeting adjourned at 10:17 a.m.	
Sonja l Plannii	led and prepared by Butler, Planning Commission Secretary ng and Economic Development Department, Saint Paul	
Respectfully submitted,		Approved
		(Date)
Larry Soderholm, AICP Planning Administrator		Marilyn Porter Secretary of the Planning Commission

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